

Message Text

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PAGE 01 BEIRUT 00941 050906Z
ACTION NEA-10

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FM AMEMBASSY BEIRUT
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 3231

C O N F I D E N T I A L BEIRUT 0941

FOR UNDERSECRETARY HABIB AND ASSISTANT SECRETARY ATHERTON

FROM THE AMBASSADOR

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: EAIR, LE
SUBJECT: CIVIL AIR NEGOTIATIONS WITH LEBANON

1. MUNIR ABU HAIDAR, PRESIDENT AND OWNER OF TMA, LEBANON'S FREIGHT-HAULING AIRLINE, CALLED ON ME MAR 3 TO DISCUSS FORTHCOMING USG-GOL CIVIL AIR NEGOTIATIONS IN WASHINGTON. HE REVIEWED BRIEFLY FEB 24 HEARINGS BEFORE CAB INVOLVING TMA AND SAID HE WOULD BE RETURNING TO WASHINGTON SOON TO PARTICIPATE IN USG/GOL DISCUSSIONS FOR NEW BILATERAL CIVIL AIR AGREEMENT MAR 15-18 AND TO PRESENT TMA BRIEF TO CAB ON MAR 16.

2. GIST OF ABU HAIDAR'S ARGUMENT IS THAT TERMINATION OF TMA'S ROUND-THE-WORLD TRAFFIC RIGHTS NOW WILL BE "FATAL" TO TMA AND BADLY HURT LEBANON'S EFFORTS TOWARDS ECONOMIC RECOVERY. A FEW YEARS AGO, COMPENSATORY EXPANSION BY TMA IN OTHER DIRECTIONS WOULD HAVE BEEN POSSIBLE; AT PRESENT, CIVAIR ACTIVITY IN LEBANON STILL EXTREMELY LIMITED AND ONLY A FEW MAJOR WORLD AIRLINES HAVE RETURNED, REDUCING DRASTICALLY THE OPPORTUNITIES FOR BILATERAL BARGAINING. IN SPITE OF THIS, MOST FOREIGN COUNTRIES, FOR EXAMPLE
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PAGE 02 BEIRUT 00941 050906Z

JAPAN, HAVE ALLOWED LEBANESE AIRLINES (READ TMA) TO CONTINUE TO OPERATE IN THEIR COUNTRIES AS THEY DID BEFORE THE LEBANESE WAR. IF USG WERE TO TERMINATE RIGHTS PREVIOUSLY HELD BY LEBANESE AIRLINES, IT WOULD CREATE TERRIBLE PRECEDENT AND MIGHT ENCOURAGE OTHERS TO DO LIKEWISE. IN BETTER DAYS, PAN AM HAD 18 FLIGHTS A WEEK TRANSITING BEIRUT AND BENEFITED FROM BILATERAL

AIR AGREEMENT FOR MORE THAN LEBANESE. ABU HAIDAR SAID
SURELY USG COULD BE GENEROUS NOW WHEN LEBANON DESPERATELY
NEEDS HELP AND ALLOW LEBANON (AND TMA) TO MAINTAIN
RIGHTS THEY HAVE ENJOYED FOR PAST SEVERAL YEARS.

3. COMMENT: THE IMPORTANCE OF THE CIVIL AIR AGREEMENT
HAS BEEN MENTIONED TO ME BY TWO MINISTERS DURING PAST
TEN DAYS AND YOU MAY RECALL THAT IT WAS ALSO
MENTIONED BY PRIME MINISTER AL-HOSS DURING SECRETARY
VANCE'S VISIT. I UNDERSTAND THERE IS SOME DISAGREEMENT
OVER JUST HOW MUCH TMA'S ACTIVITIES HAVE HURT US
AIRLINES ON TRANS-PACIFIC RUNS; APPARENTLY SOME OF OUR
PEOPLE BELIEVE A LEBANESE AIRLINE HAS NO BUSINESS OPERATING
IN THE PACIFIC IN ANY CASE. NEVERTHELESS, GOL ATTACHES
CONSIDERABLE IMPORTANCE TO MAINTAINING PRESENT CIVIL
AVIATION RIGHTS IN US AND THIS APPEARS TO BE AN AREA
IN WHICH WE CAN HELP. I WOULD APPRECIATE YOUR
ASSISTANCE IN SEEING THAT POLITICAL FACTORS INVOLVED IN
THIS QUESTION ARE GIVEN ADEQUATE WEIGHT WHEN USG/GOL
CIVIL AIR NEGOTIATIONS BEGIN ON MAR 15.
PARKER

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